Black-hearted Sellers in the Skincare Industry: Their Activities and Prevention Strategies

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Abstract: While online purchases have increased substantially since the pandemic, the cases of "black-hearted" sellers taking advantage of their buyers using unethical activities or marketing tactics are increasing as well, especially in the skincare industry. If this continues, it will subsequently result in the online platform to become 'untrustable' among the skincare buyers. Hence, this paper aims to examine the activities of black-hearted sellers and suggest solutions that could prevent them from conducting their businesses. Using semi-structured interviews conducted with 20 experienced official skin care sellers, this paper found that the activities generated by the black-hearted sellers are counterfeiting, parallel imports, misleading information, reselling without authorisation, and identity theft. Also, several strategies that can prevent these activities are quality strategy, adjusting price strategies, technology strategies, enforcement strategies, supply chain structure, and marketing communication strategies.

Keywords: Black-hearted sellers, trustable online trading platform, skincare industry

1. Introduction

In Malaysia, online transactions increased by 28.9 percent since the Movement Control Order (MCO) was enforced in March 2020 (Bernama, 2021). One of the most demanded goods purchased online is skincare products, where increasing online retailers contribute to the increasing number of online shoppers. As a result, cases of "black-hearted" sellers taking advantage of their customers using unethical or even illegal activities or marketing tactics to attract more customers are increasing as well. There have been 2,997 cases of fake products reported from 2017 to 2020 in Malaysia (Nathan, 2021). This shows that establishing a trustworthy online marketplace is crucial for skincare sellers and buyers.

Besides, due to the growing demand for cosmetics and skincare products and an increasing number of beauty products that put people's health at risk by counterfeiting or using chemical ingredients to achieve better skincare results, has made customers to pay more attention to the quality of cosmetics and skincare products (Li, 2021). Red Points' market research showed that 87 percent of fake cosmetics and skincare products are sold illegally on genuine online marketplaces and 51 percent of the products considered infringing intellectual property came from social media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram (Williams, 2019). Furthermore, counterfeit skincare products are beautifully packaged with lower prices on third-party platforms and often cause potential skin damage to unsuspecting buyers. However, there are hidden costs, including the risk of these products being stolen, counterfeited, expired, or otherwise altered from the claims on the label (Hayes Valley Medical & Esthetics, 2020). Therefore, understanding the activities of "black-hearted" sellers on online platforms allows buyers, and even online sellers to raise their alertness and avoid falling into the trap of "black-hearted" sellers. Also, trust is an essential factor in a customer's decision to purchase a product (Kim et al., 2013). Whether online or in a physical shop, the customer trusts that the buying product will meet expectations (MarkMonitor, 2017). This trust has formed the basis of the customer experience and is one of the factors that helps build loyalty and

retention (Kim et al., 2013). In fact, "black-hearted" sellers caused severe problems in the market today, but too many people do not realise the full extent of their impact on brands. According to a report by brand protection agency, Incopro, has found that one in two consumers, or 52 percent, said they had lost trust in a brand after inadvertently buying a fake product online. 64 percent of those consumers said they would also lose trust in the marketplace, purchasing counterfeit products. This resulted in black-hearted" sellers harming the trust between online sellers and customers, making the entire online selling challenging to expand, especially in the online skin care industry. Hence, it is once again crucial for this research to find out the suitable strategies to stop these "black-hearted" sellers from conducting their businesses to build up a trustable online trading platform. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate the activities generated by the black-hearted sellers on online trading platform and subsequently suggests strategies to prevent these sellers from conducting their businesses online.

2. Literature Review

Generally, "black-hearted" sellers have destroyed the market by stealing sales by lowering the market prices, damaging the reputation of genuine brands, and undermining the long-term trust built with business partners (Williams, 2018). This unethical behaviour for gaining higher profits and margins attracts a lot of unscrupulous activities and tendencies. Additionally, lack of trust can negatively influence consumers' willingness to use online trading platforms, especially in the skincare product area, as counterfeit skincare products could cause potential skin damage to unsuspecting buyers. As a result, it proved that "black-hearted" sellers destroying the market and selling counterfeit goods would affect a brand's reputation and customers' trust.

2.1 Online Trading Platform

An online trading platform is a software application where both parties, the seller and the consumer, play their roles (Chai, 2019). It enables customers around the world to shop online with ease, as geographical or physical barriers no longer limit businesses. In the online skincare industry, most branded products choose to sell them on their official websites or on other online retail platforms (Tan, 2020). For example, Malaysia's most visited online retail platform, Shopee, which has the highest sales of products including several Korean brands such as Some By Mi, has no retail shops in Malaysia. This means that consumers rely on e-commerce to buy these products, and shows how effective it can be to create a great online shopping experience when reaching out to consumers who do not even have a physical presence in the country.

2.2 Trust in An Online Trading Platform

Though e-commerce is developing rapidly, lacking of trust has become the main obstacle to consumer intention in online trading. Trust is also a major factor in a customer's decision to buy a product (Kim et al., 2013). Whether on an online platform or in a physical shop, the customer trusts that the buying product will meet expectations (MarkMonitor, 2017). This trust has formed the basis of the customer experience and is one of the factors that helps build loyalty and retention (Kim et al., 2013).

2.3 Black-hearted Seller

According to Jackson & Jones (2018), "black-hearted" sellers are increasingly becoming a brand protection concern for manufacturers and authorised online sellers, especially as consumers increasingly buy from online trading platforms. "Black-hearted" sellers are those who sell an original-looking copy of genuine products for fraudulent or illegal purposes (Wang et al., 2020). Although many products sold by "black-hearted" sellers' are counterfeits, some of the products sold are manufactured by and for the brand owner. "Black-hearted" sellers' also buy products wholesale from third-party sellers at a discounted price and then resell them without the manufacturer's permission or consent (Jackson & Jones, 2018). Consequently, "black-hearted" sellers have destroyed the market by stealing sales by lowering market prices, damaging the reputation of genuine brands, and causing businesses to suffer the consequences of counterfeit products (Williams, 2018). This unethical behaviour to achieve higher profits and profit margins attracts many unscrupulous activities and tendencies. However, it is also possible to originally be a conscientious seller and then slowly be blackened by reality. In this study, online sellers who engage in illegal activities that destroy online marketplaces and damage the long-term trust of business partners are referred to as "black-hearted" sellers".

2.4 Activities Generated by "Black-hearted" Sellers

Five activities carried out by "black-hearted" sellers" on online trading platforms are: Counterfeiting, parallel imports, misleading information, reselling without authorisation and identity theft.

2.4.1 Counterfeiting

Buttice et al. (2020) describe counterfeiting as a phenomenon that violates the function of the property rights system by allowing competitors of the original producers to share in the intangible assets of the firm and imposing a loss of value on consumers who buy copies without their knowledge. Moreover, counterfeiting is generally defined as the production and sale of "copied products" that are illegal (Wang et al., 2020). In addition, counterfeiting includes substituting or placing inferior products in original or reused packaging; copying; directly imitating packaging, products, and instructions; tampering with packaging or labels; and replacing the actual product with stolen, pilfered, or pilfered goods, as well as return and warranty fraud (Jan & Louise, 2019; Berman, 2008). In addition, economically motivated counterfeiting activities often involve substituting an inferior product at a price lower than the cost of producing the genuine article (Soo & Manning, 2019; Buttice et al., 2020). Furthermore, counterfeiting also can be categorized into non-deceptive counterfeit goods, "teardown" counterfeiting, "third shift" or product overruns.

2.4.2 Parallel Imports

Jyeshta et al. (2019) outline that parallel imports, commonly referred to as grey market goods, are defined in Halsbury's Laws of Malaysia as "in the narrow sense, the importation and sale of goods originating from the owner of industrial property rights by others in parallel with his importation of such goods, whether carried out by himself or through authorised agents, but the term is broader and describes the importation and sale by third parties of goods acquired in another country and originating from an internationally known company or group." In addition, parallel imports occur because of the different prices that may occur in the markets of different countries, and products sold in one country may be exported to another country at a lower price than the price there (Cateora et al., 2020, pp. 568-570). Equally important, the restrictions imposed by import quotas and high tariffs can also lead to parallel imports and make illegal imports more attractive (Cateora et al., 2020). Furthermore, Jyeshta et al. (2019) points out that the sale of imported products in parallel is also considered unfair business competition for IP owners and local authorised distributors because they are subject to local trade terms or conditions and may not be able to compete with parallel importers.

2.4.3 Misleading Information

According to Lamothe (2018), misleading information is misleading advertising designed to persuade customers to buy something or visit their shop. Some information gives the impression of a product that is not true or of product features that do not exist (Nuseir, 2018). Also, the strategy used to increase the chances of winning is when "black-hearted" salespeople mislead customers (Prashant & Yi, 2020). Misleading information also includes misleading photos or illustrations, price deception, misleading context and misleading discounts.

2.4.4 Unauthorised Reselling

In an unauthorised resale process, the reseller does not inform the brand owner about the resale process (Huang et al., 2020). The "black-hearted" sellers declare that the data item is theirs to earn all the revenue on their own. Furthermore, although many products sold by "black-hearted" sellers are counterfeits, some of the products sold are manufactured by and for the brand owner. The sale of actual products by "black-hearted" sellers poses the greatest legal challenge to well-known brand manufacturers (Payne, 2014). Regardless of the source, these 'black-hearted' sellers, operating outside the brand owner's authorised distribution channels, can undercut the prices of authorised resellers. This is because they pay little, if anything, for overhead, advertising, showrooms, quality control, after-sales service and warranty services (Payne, 2014; Hale & Slenkovich, 2016). Without these expenses, "black" marketeers' use their unfair advantage to depress prices and make it difficult for authorised dealers and their brands to make a profit (Payne, 2014).

2.4.5 Identity Theft

Kagan (2019) explains that identity theft is the crime of using another person's personal or financial information to commit fraud, such as unauthorised transactions or purchases. The OECD organisation defines identity theft as a case where one party obtains the identity of another person, transfers, possesses or uses personal information of a natural or legal person in an unauthorised manner, intending to commit or involve, fraud or other crime (Lai et al., 2012). Furthermore, identity theft is committed in a variety of ways and victims often suffer damage to their credit, finances and reputation. Identity thieves steal a person's identity using advanced technological methods, including spoofing or phishing, hacking and malware (Lai et al., 2012). The impact of identity theft can be devastating for individuals and businesses. Whether the victim's reputation is damaged by a social media takeover or their financial information is used to fraudulently obtain credit, it is a highly personal offence (Parent, 2018).

2.5 Strategies to Stop These "black-hearted" Sellers from Conducting Their Business

As the activities of "black-hearted" sellers seriously damage trust in the online trading platform, the company and its official online sellers need to develop appropriate strategies to overcome the problems. Therefore, strategies are

proposed to prevent these "black-hearted" sellers from conducting their business on the online trading platform, including quality strategies, price adjustment strategies, technology strategies, enforcement strategies, supply chain structure and marketing strategies.

2.5.1 Quality Strategy

According to Zhang et al. (2010), the quality of a product includes both real quality and brand equity. Moreover, the quality strategy is used to combat illegal activities by widening the quality gap to mitigate competition and reduce information asymmetry caused by counterfeiting (Qian et al., 2015; Virkkunen, 2016). Virkkunen (2016) mentions that reducing the quality of counterfeit goods is one way to tackle counterfeiting. However, this is usually difficult and requires a lot of effort, so brand manufacturers prefer to improve the quality of genuine products (Virkkunen, 2016). As expected, counterfeits lead to a decrease in the price and profit of the branded product. Therefore, it encourages an organisation to invest more in improving the quality of its product by invoking the quality improvement strategy (Zhang et al., 2010).

2.5.2 Adjusting Pricing Strategies

According to Lim (2018), pricing strategy is a model designed for organisations so that they can identify the most suitable prices for their products or services. This also takes into account factors such as consumer needs and market conditions, with the aim of attaining maximising profits in order to generate shareholder value. In relation specifically to black-hearted sellers who indulge in illegal activities, price may be one of the primary considerations when consumers make purchase decisions (Virkkunen, 2016). Hence, it is suggested that the organisation adjusts its current product selling price in order to overcome any potential economic challenges caused by high prices signals and a lack of uniform pricing. By making this change, it will allow customers to more easily differentiate between competitors' products, enabling them make better decisions regarding which brand offers greater value for money. This adjustment could help stimulate sales while providing an alternative option due to market competition or standardised prices set by external forces such as public policy makers.

2.5.3 Technology Strategy

Jan & Louise (2019) explain that technological strategies can distinguish authentic products from fraudulent items. Technologies should be difficult to duplicate, difficult to reuse, but easy to apply and visually identify, and easy to recognise when they have been altered (Li, 2013). Furthermore, technology strategies can also be differentiated into authentication technologies, track and trace technologies and NFC technology. Authentication technologies aim to facilitate the verification and recognition of original products by providing a sophisticated reproduction solution that cannot be easily detected by counterfeiters (Lima et al., 2018). Authentication is generally done through overt or covert technologies of the product. In addition, tracking and tracing are crucial concepts in the global supply chain and logistical networks (Louw & Walker, 2018). Tracking and tracing technologies in supply chains include RFID, EPC, barcode and web portal tools (Li, 2013). In addition, near field communication (NFC) is the latest in connectivity. With NFC technology, the organisation can quickly and efficiently transfer information from one device to another with a single touch, be it exchanging information, downloading coupons, etc. (Tardi, 2022)

2.5.4 Enforcement Strategy

Enforcement strategies, by the word enforcement, mean "an action or procedure that compels compliance with a law, order, directive, decree or agreement" (Mohamed & Wahid, 2014). Before taking enforcement action, the organisation must ensure that trademarks are registered and the relevant intellectual property rights are maintained. Malaysia's enforcement strategies in combating the activities of "black" heart' sellers are border measures, criminal prosecution and civil enforcement.

2.5.5 Supply Chain Structure

The supply chain is one of the critical areas where brands must invest in eliminating counterfeiting and protecting their brand identity. In this regard, Lim et al., (2017) points out that the manufacturer, distributor, or any other relevant party should recognise the intellectual property rights of the trademark owner and commit not to copy, challenge, or assist others in doing so. Equally important, organisations should investigate potential partners at the time of contracting and agree with reliable partners to avoid cases where trading partners sell counterfeit products along with originals (Lim et al., 2017; Berman, 2018). In addition, Lim et al. (2017) suggests that specific clauses be included in manufacturing, distribution, and other supply chain contracts to avoid problems with counterfeit and grey goods, including responsibility for selling inferior goods and for producing more goods than required by the contract and prohibiting the use of the manufacturer's proprietary goods without authorisation from the rights holder. In addition, Jan & Louise (2019) describe that the organisation needs to provide information on the authorised retailers that sell the original and implement a seller

verification program to be verified for compliance. The company can also offer guarantees and after-sales service to consumers if they buy the original (Jan & Louise, 2019).

2.5.6 Marketing Communication Strategy

Clients can play a vital role in reducing the sales of counterfeit products and associated costs (MarkMonitor, 2016). In addition to this an effective marketing communication strategy should be employed which encourages word-of-mouth about all original features (Jan & Louise, 2019). This would help consumers better understand what constitutes genuine items as well as emphasise on their quality or appearance. The public must be adequately warned of the health and safety risks that come with using imitation products. The additional moral mismatch surrounding consumer's indirect contribution to organised criminal activities is another issue (Herstein et al., 2015). It is also important for consumers to be informed about counterfeit items, as well as encouraging them to report any suspicious illicit activity trails from "black-hearted" sellers (Berman, 2018; MarkMonitor, 2016).

3. Research Methods

To better understand the activities of online sellers, the researcher interviewed 20 individuals with at least one year of experience in different categories of online sellers of skin care products to gain better knowledge and accurate data. Therefore, the researcher confirmed to the respondents that he/she is an online skin care seller and asked them about their experience in online selling before the researcher started the virtual interview sessions. In addition, the researcher interviewed the respondents within two to three hours to achieve the research objectives using semi-structured interviews. The virtual interview or data collection had to be conducted on a one-to-one basis through Zoom meetings to avoid the risk of participant bias and to allow respondents to express their honest opinions and responses. To protect respondents privacy, it was agreed that they would remain anonymous, and the material provided was kept confidential. The primary data supplied by respondents needed to be screened and validated during the data collection. With the Respondents' permission, the interview sessions were recorded and transcribed to provide a basis for reliable data analysis. Finally, the information collected will be examined by using thematic analysis.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

The data are collected by conducting a qualitative semi-structured interview with a total of 20 experienced online skincare sellers, which categorised into premium skin care products online sellers, affordable skin care products online sellers, and standard skin care products online sellers, respectively. The findings are then being analysed with thematic analysis.

4.1 Activities Generated by "Black-hearted" Sellers

The online skin care market has long been plagued by activities that generated by "black-hearted" sellers. From the perspective of these online skin care sellers, it was easier to understand the details of the activities listed below.

4.1.1 Counterfeiting

Counterfeiting is defined as the production and sale of "copied products" that are illegal (Wang et al., 2020). In addition, counterfeiting activities included the sale and manufacture of products using the trademark without seeking permission from the trademark owner (Jennings, 1989; Wang et al., 2020). In the interviews, Respondent 18 and Respondent 16 explained counterfeiting, which is the production of fake goods marked with the official company name, but the packaging is not 100 per cent identical to them, there must be differences. Also, the counterfeit products are associated with products of high brand value. Respondent 12 said that her company is one of the largest direct selling companies in the United States and has long suffered from the problem of counterfeiting. In addition, respondent 11 noted that her company was a relatively new brand and not yet well known, so there would be no "black-hearted" sellers to counterfeit her company's products.

Apart from this, Respondent 19 noted that in cases of counterfeiting, the counterfeit goods encountered usually appear to be genuine on the surface but are not, and the company has no way of knowing what ingredients are in them. Respondent 3 and Respondent 14 pointed out that the counterfeits were also associated with facial problems and a health hazard as the skin care products were applied directly to the customers' skin. Respondents 18 and 20 explained that before the genuine products were put on the market, they were subjected to constant research and development by the companies to ensure that they did not harm the human body. However, the "black-hearted" sellers do not have this concern and want to sell the product to make money through counterfeits. In addition to the existence of counterfeits, Respondent 15 clarified that there is also a type of genuine product that is not pure. The reason for this is that the ingredients of skin care products are sensitive and it is easy for them to deteriorate if they were exposed to the sun all the time. Thus, the "black-hearted" sellers were selling them at cheaper prices on third-party platforms.

4.1.2 Parallel Imports

In addition, parallel imports occurred due to the different prices that may occur in different countries' markets, and products sold in one country may be exported to another country at a lower price than that country charges (Cateora et al., 2020). During the interviews, most respondents stated that parallel importation did not have a major negative impact on official online sellers, as world market prices were not far apart. Respondent 12 also admitted that her company used to face the problem of counterfeit and parallel imported products in China because her company's products, which were franchised in China, were the most expensive in the world, so this grey market was created. At that time, "black-hearted" sellers bought genuine products at a lower price and then sold them to places where the price was higher. But now everything was supposed to get better, and respondents 12 did not see much such news at the moment.

In addition, Jyeshta et al. (2019) pointed out that the sale of parallel imported products is also considered unfair business competition for intellectual property owners and local authorised distributors, as they are subject to local trading conditions and may not be able to compete with parallel importers. Therefore, parallel imports will harm the market for branded products in the long run. However, respondent 17, who sold affordable skin care products, noted that parallel imports could be mutually beneficial as the customer could spend less and the trader could earn more money. Similar comments were made by respondent 18, who explained that parallel imports are common among micro-enterprises. Most sellers travel to other countries for this reason to buy the products on their behalf and earn from the price difference. Finally, respondent 18 also emphasised that buying and selling is about what the customers want, as long as the customers are satisfied with the transaction, so it cannot be concluded that this seller's behaviour was wrong.

4.1.3 Misleading Information

According to Lamothe (2018), misleading information is misleading advertising designed to persuade customers to buy something or visit their shop. Some information gave the impression of a product that was false or non-existent product features (Nuseir, 2018). Therefore, misleading information influenced consumer choice and the purchase process. Misleading information could be misleading photos or illustrations, price deception, misleading context and misleading discounts. During the interviews with the respondents, most of them said that the typical case of misleading information was the exaggeration of the effectiveness of the products. Respondent 17, who sold affordable skincare products, also claimed that misleading information was quite common in skincare products and customers did not have confidence in the Malaysian market as there were many fraudsters. In addition, the respondent 10 stated that misleading information can affect the quality of a product. If the "black-hearted" sellers always exaggerate how good a product is, it can make many people want to buy it, but it turns out that it is not that good, which can affect the quality and reputation of the product.

Meanwhile, Respondent 11 stated that misleading information can occur when some customers misunderstand the product information because they do not know the difficult scientific terms of skin care products. Both Respondent 7 and Respondent 20 also suggested that some newcomers to the company who were not familiar with the product may also lead to misleading customers. Previously, misleading information led to serious problems and customers misunderstanding or distrusting the product. However, Respondent 5 pointed out that it was not only the "black-hearted" sellers who exaggerated the effectiveness of their products, but there were also many official sellers who did the same and exaggerated the effect to sell their products. Even respondent 3, who sold standard skin care products, agreed that misleading information can also always be considered a marketing technique.

4.1.4 Unauthorised Reselling

Although many products sold by "black-hearted" sellers are counterfeits, some products are sold were manufactured by and for the trademark owner. Selling actual products by "black-hearted" sellers represented the most significant legal challenge for well-known brand manufacturers (Payne, 2014). In discussions with Respondents, almost all agreed that unauthorised reselling on online trading platforms is commonplace, as there are many "black-hearted" sellers who sell their branded products at lower prices on third-party platforms such as Shopee and Lazada, which is against their company's rules. They described that the "black-hearted" sellers resold the products on these third-party platforms to complete more orders and earn bonus points, thinking that sales would be difficult to achieve through the regular channel.

In addition, "black-hearted" sellers can obtain these genuine products in a variety of ways, and the most common method they used was bulk stocking of products (Payne, 2014). Respondent 20, who sold high-end skin care products, agreed that one of the main reasons for reselling without authorisation was bulk stocking of products. Similarly, Respondent 1, Respondent 8, and Respondent 20 expressed during the interview, "After replenishing the supplies, another problem was that the "black-hearted" sellers would repackage the product and resell it at a low price if the product was not sold and was close to its expiration date." While this aspect was perfectly fine for the government and customers, it could have implications for the official company and its online sellers. Equally important, Respondent 20 pointed out that unauthorised resale can also lead to the problem of counterfeiting, as there is no way to determine the origin of the product since it is not certified. This could also be classified as a gray area since it is not as serious as counterfeiting, which is against the law, so there will be many people who want to try it.

4.1.5 Identity Theft

According to Jordan et al. (2018), an important consequence of the emergence of the Internet has been the rise of cybercrime, which has led to its increasing use for conducting business activities through electronic means. In addition, Kagan (2019) explains that identity theft is a crime in which another person's personal or financial information is used to exploit their identity for fraud, such as unauthorised transactions or purchases. During data collection, Respondent 9, who sold affordable skin care products, said that the common situation of identity theft is to use other people's identity information to create empty sales accounts. When people send money to buy goods, the "black-hearted" sellers block the customers directly without sending the products. Furthermore, the impact of identity theft can be devastating for individuals and businesses. Whether the victim's reputation has been damaged by a social media takeover or their financial details have been used to fraudulently obtain credit, it is a very personal offence (Parent, 2018). That being said, Respondent 3, who sold standard skin care products, agreed that this damaged her reputation more than the brand. Besides, Respondent 3, who sold standard skin care products, agreed that this damaged her reputation more than the brand.

On the other hand, Respondent 10 and Respondent 14, who sold high-end skin care products, claimed that the "black-hearted" sellers usually looked for the more famous internet celebrities and stole their identities to sell the products because the internet celebrities were already known. Then their fans will trust them and buy the products. An equally important scenario of identity theft was the theft of a company's identity for personal gain. As the Respondent 18 reasoned, it acknowledged that there had also been a case before where the company hired an internet celebrity to sell the product. Nevertheless, this celebrity gave his private account to the fan and the company did not receive the transfer, which also resulted in the company not being able to deliver the product to the customer. Since most respondents had no opinion on identity theft, most felt that it would never happen to them and that even if it did happen, it would not have a big impact on them. Thus, it is not recommended to be included in the online skincare industry, as this does not involve the official online sellers.

Table 1- Summary table for activities generated by "black-hearted" sellers

Activities	Main key point from respondents.	
Counterfeiting	-	Counterfeit products are associated with high brand value products [P, Respondent 12].
	-	It was manufacturing fake goods, will be marked with the official company's name, but the packaging is not 100% identical to them [P, Respondent 16; Respondent 18].
	-	Counterfeiting was also linked to facial problems and the health at risk [P, Respondent 3; Respondent 14].
	-	Counterfeiting could damage the company's reputation, so the company needs to clarify to the customers clearly [P, Respondent 17; Respondent 18].
	-	The kind of OEM factories on the market where the "black-hearted" sellers can get similar as authentic counterfeits to sell [P, Respondent 18].
Parallel Imports	-	It was not much negative impact on the official online sellers [P, Respondent 4; Respondent 5; Respondent 7].
	-	It could be a mutually beneficial activity P, Respondent 17].
	-	Buying and selling were about what the customers wanted, as long as the customers agreed to the transaction [P, Respondent 18].
	-	It would be challenging for parallel import to happen to our company because our company have grown so much [P, Respondent 14].
Misleading Information	-	Exaggerating the efficacy of the products will confuse the consumers about these products [P, Respondent 7; Respondent 20].
	-	It can lead to severe problems and can cause customers to misunderstand or distrust the product [P, Respondent 2; Respondent 7; Respondent 15].
	-	It was not just representative of the product information, and it can also be misleading about the endorser [P, Respondent 18].
	-	Not only did were the "black-hearted" sellers were exaggerated the efficacy of their products, but there are also many official sellers who do the same [P, Respondent 5].
	-	It could also be considered a marketing technique all the time [P, Respondent 3].
	-	It may occur when some customers do not recognize the difficult scientific terms of the skin care products [P, Respondent 11].

	-	It may also lead to misleading customers as the newcomers not familiar with the products [P, Respondent 7; Respondent 20].
Reselling without Authorisation	-	The "black-hearted" sellers thought the sales were difficult to reach in the regular ways [P, Respondent 5; Respondent 9; Respondent 11; Respondent 15].
	-	The "black-hearted" sellers were also made private promotions similar to the company's [P, Respondent 13; Respondent 14; Respondent 15].
	-	The "black-hearted" sellers will repackage the close to expired date product and sell it again at a low price [P, Respondent 1; Respondent 8; Respondent 20].
	-	One of the biggest reasons for reselling without authorisation is mass stockpiling products [P, Respondent 20].
	-	Most of the customers prefer to buy cheaper products rather than support the official distributors [P, Respondent 6].
	-	It can also give rise to the problem of counterfeiting as the product is not certified [P, Respondent 20].
Identity Theft	-	The common situation was using other people's identity information to make empty selling accounts [P, Respondent 9].
	-	Another identity theft scenario was the theft of a company's identity for the personal gained [P, Respondent 18].
	-	The "black-hearted" sellers would use others' identity to convey the wrong product information to the customers, which would affect the related company's image [P, Respondent 11].
	-	The "black-hearted" sellers usually stole famous internet celebrities' identities to sell the products as the internet celebrities were already well-known [P, Respondent 10; Respondent 14].

4.2 Strategies to Stop These "Black-hearted" Sellers from Conducting Their Business

After understanding the activities of "black-hearted" sellers, the researcher collected the insights and advice given by official online skin care product sellers to identify strategies to stop these "black-hearted" sellers from conducting their business.

4.2.1 Quality Strategy

According to Zhang et al. (2010), the quality of a product includes both real quality and brand equity. In addition to improving product quality, reducing the quality of counterfeit goods has been one way to tackle counterfeiting (Virkkunen, 2016). However, this was usually difficult and required a lot of effort, so brand manufacturers preferred to improve the quality of genuine products (Virkkunen, 2016). According to respondents 12, 14 and 19, their company has a research and development team of more than 900 scientists who constantly research and develop the products. Experts and volunteers have tested their products before launch to ensure high quality and safety. Respondent 10 also demonstrated that its company updates its products every two years, so that even if a "black-hearted" seller wants to copy it, it will be difficult to consistently replicate the latest technology. In addition, the quality strategy was used to combat illegal activities by reducing the quality gap to mitigate competition and reduce the asymmetry of the information brought by counterfeiting (Qian et al., 2015; Virkkunen, 2016). Respondent 6 also emphasised that his company has improved its quality to distance itself from counterfeit products in such situations. The reason for implementing the company's policy was to protect the safety and health of customers, so lowering the quality and prices in his company was impossible.

In addition, most respondents felt that the quality policy was moderately effective in preventing these "black marketeers" from operating. Respondent 12 stated that quality does not matter much to customers if they do not know the background of their company and the quality of their products. Even if the quality is good, customers do not see the difference between real and fake products and choose the cheaper products. Respondent 20 emphasised that 80 percent of customers in the market are reasonable and pay attention to the quality of the product and service. Similarly, some of the respondents emphasised that the quality strategy was highly effective in this situation.

Respondent 10 and Respondent 14 felt that it was difficult for the "black-hearted" vendors to imitate the latest products. The "black heart" sellers might spend too much money to imitate them if they wanted to copy them. Respondent 2 also agreed that the "black heart" sellers do not invest in improving the quality of the counterfeit products to increase the quality difference between genuine and counterfeit products. Apart from that, few respondents admitted that the quality strategy was ineffective in combating these "black-hearted" sellers. However, Respondent 6, Respondent 9, and Respondent 17 indicated that their company will continue to develop high-quality products for their customers, regardless of "black-hearted" salespeople.

4.2.2 Adjusting Price Strategies

Lim (2018) defined pricing strategy as a model or method for determining the best price for a product or service. It helps the company to choose prices that maximise profit and shareholder value while taking into account the needs of consumers and the market (Lim, 2018). Furthermore, Virkkunen (2016) showed the actual price reduction of the product as a measure to combat counterfeiting. However, price reduction may not be helpful in all product categories, especially for premium products (Wang et al., 2020). Throughout the interview, Respondent 1, Respondent 13 and Respondent 17 held the view that the company was not free to change prices, but only to run promotions on certain holidays. Respondent 12 stated that their products were high quality skincare products and therefore they would not lower the price to compete with the "black-hearted" traders. Respondent 8 felt that there is no difference with a "black-hearted" seller when a company lowers market prices. Respondent 10 also felt that if her company lowered the price, the products would no longer be of good quality and many people would not believe that the products were genuine. Respondent 20 also commented that a price cut will create an endless war.

Regarding the effect of high price signals, Qian et al. (2014) found that increasing the price of genuine products effectively reduces the sale of counterfeit goods. In the discussion, most of the respondents emphasised that companies cannot simply increase market prices as most customers now prioritise the products with lower prices. Respondent 10 explained that if the price is inflated, customers who like the products will fear that the price and quality are not comparable because the price is too high. It will be found that the company exaggerates the effectiveness of the products and cheats the customers. In addition, the company's head office sets the world market prices and then applies them to all markets, taking into account exchange rates and deviations in the normal framework. Moreover, price standardisation between country markets is one of the necessary changes to avoid the problem of parallel importation (Cateora et al., 2020).

During the interview sessions, it was noted that almost all of the respondents stated that their products had been priced uniformly in all countries and regions. Interestingly enough, Respondent 13 revealed her company's success in multiple global markets by highlighting they maintained an identical pricing strategy across each country region for fairness purposes. Respondent 6 further highlighted that her company had a flat price and frequently held promotional activities, providing customers with gifts. This allowed for customer loyalty to the official online sellers as they felt value for money in their purchase. On the other hand, Respondent 5 mentioned that his company did not have wholesale prices but still managed to attract buyers albeit from third party platforms.

Virkkunen (2016) found that price is a major factor when it comes to consumers buying counterfeit goods. He suggested the organisation adjust their current product selling prices in order to counteract this, and most respondents believe this could be successful. It highlights how important pricing can be when combating illegal activities of "black-hearted" sellers who offer cheaper alternatives due to lower costs or taxes associated with them. Respondents discovered during the survey that changing prices was not an effective way to combat "black-hearted" merchants. Justified by Respondent 2 and Respondent 14, they found that their company's market price remained consistent in different parts of China regardless of any changes made to it. This is because respondents concluded through this research that despite potential fluctuation in pricing, customers would still purchase from these so called "black-hearted" sellers due to them often providing cheaper goods than those sold originals companies resulting in difficult competition for original brands and retailers. In contrast to the majority of respondent's opinion, only a few assumed that adjusting price strategies were highly effective. Respondent 8 argued in favour of standardizing prices as it makes it easier for companies to identify any "black-hearted" sellers due to their lower market prices.

4.2.3 Technology Strategies

Jan & Louise (2019) suggest that technology strategies can be beneficial in helping authenticate products and determine if they are genuine or counterfeit. Whereas Li (2013) added that the technologies used should be hard to duplicate, difficult to reuse but easy enough for people to apply visually and immediately detect any alteration attempts.

(i) Authentication Technologies

Authentication technologies are designed to facilitate the verification and recognition of genuine products. It provides a challenging reproduce solution that counterfeiters find difficult to detect. However, based on interviews conducted by Lima et al. (2018), most respondents commented that they could not discover any overt or covert technology in their product's packaging. The watermark has served as a guarantee to customers when buying genuine products. However, its use extended beyond that with Respondent 19 noting how it can also be used for distinguishing between fake and authentic items. Furthermore, they noted the necessity of this feature since few people around the world are able to imitate their company's unique watermark designs or features. This further reduces any chances of fraud or potential counterfeits from entering into transactions with unsuspecting buyers. Counterfeiting of products has been a major issue for brands in the 21st century. This includes counterfeiters who can successfully reproduce counterfeits which look very similar to genuine products due to their high level of sophistication. To combat this, many companies have adopted covert technologies that require special reading devices for authentication such as security inks, digital watermarks, chemical

fingerprints and invisible printing (Lima et al., 2018). By incorporating these features into their product range, it gives them peace-of-mind knowing that they are one step ahead when deterring potential counterfeit activity.

In addition, according to the respondents, their products were fully packaged in secure containers with package sealing tapes for security purposes. Respondents 13 and 17 concurred that these packages can easily prove if the product has been used or opened by anyone. Moreover, respondent 7 also clarified that all of their products are certified prior to packaging as an additional safety measure. Apart from this, Respondent 11 claimed that her company was relatively new in the online skincare markets, so there were no overt and covert technologies on the packaging and no tracking code to trace the products.

(ii) Track and Trace Technologies

Tracking and tracing were critical concepts in the global supply chain and logistic networks (Louw & Walker, 2018). Tracking and tracing technologies in supply chains included RFID, EPC, barcode, and web portal tools (Li, 2013). In addition, barcodes, originally used to manage inventory, have evolved into tracking and tracking techniques, as well as were making considerable improvements in protecting products from illegal activities by "black-hearted" sellers (Li, 2013). However, a minor of respondents described the packaging of products in their companies attached to barcode only during the data collection. During the interview sessions, Respondent 10 and Respondent 18 also commented that any products were recorded and had their code. When the official online sellers buy the products to sell, they need to scan the product's barcode and record it in their system so that they do not scan it again when they sell it. Additionally, Respondent 14 explained that every product in his company has a code that allows the customer to verify and trace back to the origin.

Likewise, Ashish (2016) highlighted that this was not just a package printed on the cover of the product, but also essential information such as the manufacturer's name, the type of item, the price., that can only be read by special barcode scanners. Justified by the real cases of Respondent 15 and Respondent 17, they mentioned that their company utilized the barcode to verify that it was genuine. Customers also can take a photo of the product's barcode to an official online seller to check the manufacturer and date of manufacture. Respondent 3 and Respondent 16 also indicated that if an agent sells their products on Shopee, Lazada, or any other platforms, her company can follow the barcode and find out which agent is selling illegally. As well, QR codes were similar to barcodes, as well as they contained much information and were easy for the customer to scan by their smartphone scanner (Ashish, 2016). The majority of respondents pointed out that there was also a QR code attached to the product so that the customers could go directly to the company's website to find out the ingredients and source of the product after they have scanned it by their smartphone. Revealed by Respondent 6, she emphasised that once the products opened, there was a code to enter the lucky draw inside the box, so their customers can scan the QR code on the box to check the company's website and enter the lucky draw, and found out if the product number is genuine. She also informed that the official online sellers were required to scan the QR code to show that they had sold the products. Thus, the company can easily track the whereabouts of the products and, if they face any problems, it also can be detected in time. Justified by the actual cases of Respondent 20, he pointed out an example to show the technology strategies of his company. His company has a cherry ingredient in their skincare toner, and the customer can use the QR code to find out how and when the product was processed and even track back to see when the cherry was harvested. Hence, if there is a problem with the product, his company can also check where the problem is by using this technology.

Equally important, according to Oliveira et al. (2020), the main task of a track and trace system was to provide end-to-end transparency within a supply chain so that customers, business partners and the logistics company itself can always know the exact state of production or delivery. Most of the respondents agreed that this kind of technology strategy were highly effective against "black-hearted" sellers. Respondent 8 and Respondent 12 inferred that technology strategies were effective, as the strategies can be used to track products and distinguish between genuine and fake products. Respondent 3 claimed that the technology strategies could make the customers buy fewer "black-hearted" products, as it was obvious to differentiate them. Then, Respondent 14 insisted that now the products can be traced back to the original manufacturer. Through this, it can know if it is a genuine product, so it still effectively combats "black-hearted" sellers. Respondent 20 also discovered that more and more customers were getting smarter and would know how to check the data. It was a greater improvement in combating "black-hearted" sellers. However, only a few of the respondents considered that the technology strategies were medium effective. Justified by Respondent 15, some of the "black-hearted" sellers may use the box of their genuine products and then put the fake products inside to sell them. Even if the company scan the barcode, they will only find that this was genuine. Also, Respondent 18 highlighted that as long as the "black-hearted" sellers want to sell their official products, they must have a way to do so, so it was fundamentally difficult to solve. It was like the parallel import issue, the official online sellers bought the goods in Malaysia, but there were still online sellers who could take them to Singapore and sell it. Hence, it was hard for the company to determine who the buyers were.

4.2.4 Enforcement Strategies

In general, the word enforcement means "an action or process that compels compliance with a law, warrant, order, decree, or agreement" (Mohamed & Wahid, 2014). Before taking the enforcement action, the organisationshall ensure that trademarks are registered, in order to maintain the relevant intellectual property rights (Lim et al., 2017). Throughout

the interview sessions with the respondents, almost every one of the respondents mentioned that their companies blacklisted the official online sellers who violated their company policy. Revealed by Respondent 2 and Respondent 15, they demonstrated that their companies sent the warning letter first when they discovered that their official online sellers reselling their products on third-party platforms. If they break the rules again, the companies will appeal to bring them to court, and they may be required to pay compensation according to the company's policy. Respondent 6 also further explained that if any agent did not follow the company's rules, such as throwing prices around and ruining the company's reputation, he or she would be disqualified from being an agent. After investigation, the company will also send warning letters to those unauthorised resellers and consider the seriousness of the matter to decide whether to sue the other party. Respondent 8 indicated that her company would not take to court because there are too many "black-hearted" sellers in the online market, so it will only be fined, and then the "black-hearted" merchants will be listed.

As stated by Abraham & Yoong San (2017), a civil action is more appropriate when the identity of the critical offending party is determined, and it's financial and property value suffices to pay for the damages and costs claimed by the right holder. Respondent 17 commented that his company's agent has a certificate to prove that they sell the product, and if not, his company has the right to sue the person who resells the products without authorisation. Moreover, Respondent 5 insisted that based on Malaysia's law and the company's rules, his company would have filed a direct complaint against the "black-hearted" sellers without a warning letter. Also, the online shops that operate on third-party platforms will be ordered to cease operations and claim compensation. Respondent 7 highlighted that her company's policy was stricter if the "black-hearted sellers go to court, it was necessary to receive a fine, and more serious cases are required to go to jail, so normally the "black-hearted" sellers will not dare to risk in her company. In addition, Respondent 12 determined that if her company finds that someone has maligned a product or conveyed false information to the public, so her company will take legal action depending on his/her attitude. An apology will be issued in public, and the company's social media platforms will then be used to inform the public about the matter. Apart from this, Respondent 20 mentioned that sometimes the "black-hearted" companies would attack his company to steal market share through the public opinion aspect, so in this case, they would be received directly in the form of a letter from a lawyer.

Generally, the respondents have two opposite opinions, which were almost half of the respondents agreed that the enforcement strategies were highly effective, while most of the others supported with low effectiveness, and lastly, among 20 respondents, only three respondents considered that it was medium effective. In terms of high effectiveness, Respondent 8 commented that as long as the company's attitude was strong to manage their agents, they would not sell at random prices and would be afraid of fines. Justified by Respondent 3 and Respondent 4, they indicated that the "black-hearted" sellers have to pay back double if they are against the rules, so no matter how much money the "black-hearted" sellers have made, they should not be willing to use it to pay back the money. Besides that, Respondent 17 emphasised that although there were a few arrests, her company did not clearly express who was arrested. It was probably because they wanted to protect their personal information. Respondent 10 also implied that although the company will check and sue, still there were too many "black-hearted" sellers on the online market, and the official online sellers could not check them one by one on third party platforms and appeal to the company.

Respondent 18 claimed that if Malaysia is careful about the laws in this area, it may be better to crack down on the unscrupulous sellers. Respondent 16 also agreed that our government could be stricter in this area, just like in Singapore. With that place, the sellers could not just open a factory to sell their products, and the number of "black-hearted" sellers was relatively small. In other words, Respondent 20 clarified that the enforcement strategies were medium effective because if the "black-hearted" company was financially strong, it was possible to win in court against the official company unless the government intervenes and says it cannot create fake products and puts the "black-hearted" seller in jail. Likewise, Respondent 14 concurred that the enforcement strategies were depended on whether they were suing the company or the agent. If it is an agent, there is not much benefit in suing, so it is better to blacklist the person. If it is a company, the company can at least apply for compensation.

4.2.5 Supply Chain Structure

The supply chain was one of the critical areas where brands need to invest in eliminating counterfeiting and protecting their brand identity. As claimed by Wang et al. (2020), when combating the illicit activities on the online trading platform, apart from providing an application of authentication technology and user-friendly verification to product packaging in the supply chain, controlling outsource suppliers also be an effective strategy. Throughout the interview sessions, Respondent 17 determined that his company has its factory over in China. There was cooperation with a third party, but that is the Chinese Ministry of Health, where does not interfere with the process and is only responsible for monitoring and testing the products. Respondent 20 also stated that 80 percent was their production line, and 20 percent packaging will be given to the third-party cooperation. This is because of the situation of Covid-19, and many transport industries were crippled. Besides that, Respondent 9 mentioned that her company also looked around the potential markets for suitable products and then talked about cooperation and ordered the large quantities labelled with their product brand. Respondent 15 also highlighted that her company's products were manufactured by a well-known Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) factory, Kaeri and Kolmar. It has been approached by many well-known brands to manufacture its products. By combining the technology and the best of both factories, they created their

subsidiary BNH, and all products from this factory can only be sold in the company, which also has a lifetime agreement with them. Hence, choosing to work with a reliable outsourcing company and working out a good contract is crucial.

Throughout the interview sessions with the respondents, almost every one of them said that their companies have their production line to supply their daily shipments. Justified by Respondent 2 and Respondent 12, they commented that their companies have their factory, production line, and even the raw materials for their products can be obtained from their organic farms, so their companies did not work with other third parties. If there is any problem, then the company will check if the product is shipped from them and will not go through any third party to manufacture their products. Additionally, Respondent 13 indicated that almost all of their products were shipped directly from the company and did not require secondary postage from the distributor so that customers could receive the latest products from the production line. These actions would also successfully reduce the problem of unauthorised reselling, as sellers would not have to worry about the expiry date of their products and would not have the goods on hand to resell, as they would all be in the company's system. In addition, Jan and Louise (2019) described that the organisationneeds to provide information on the authorised retailers that sell the original and implement a seller verification program to be verified for compliance. The company can also offer guarantees and after-sales service to consumers if they buy the original (Jan and Louise, 2019). Respondent 7 and Respondent 10 claimed that their companies provided a satisfaction guarantee, which means that if the customers do not use more than 20 percent of their products, they can return them to the company. Similarly, Respondent 15 mentioned there was a 30-day satisfaction guarantee in his company, so the customers can use it and then return it directly for cash if anything does not fit.

Moreover, most of the respondents agreed that supply chain structure has a significant influence against "black-hearted" sellers. With the healthy supply chain structure, the quality control has always been reasonable, and it was difficult for a "black-hearted" seller to imitate 100 percent of authentic products. However, this strategy must be grounded in human resource strategies that emphasise the need to protect a company's core capabilities, legal issues, and alliance processes that protect information flows and access information for partners (Berman, 2008). Justified by Respondent 3, Respondent 8, and Respondent 14, there were fewer middlemen, the lower the risk of leaking product information for people to imitate. After that, Respondent 2 and Respondent 12 considered that the supply chain structure could prevent third shifts or product overruns. Respondent 1 also commented that the supply chain could trace back the seller who bought the company's products. Equally important, Respondent 3, Respondent 10, and Respondent 18 described the shipping products by the company only made it difficult for reselling problems to occur without going through many formalities. In contrast, only Respondent 5 argued that the supply chain structure made it difficult to stop "black-hearted" sellers because they could bring ready-made products to the OEM factory to imitate them, and the brand may be placed differently.

4.2.6 Marketing Communication Strategy

A marketing communication strategy was used to capture consumer attention and entice consumers to contact the business (Leonard, 2019). Most respondents believed that the marketing communication strategy was highly influential in combating "black-hearted" sellers. Respondent 20 identified the marketing communication strategy was the only way for customers to know the "black-hearted" sellers through their company. Respondent 7, who was in charge of premium skin care products, pointed out that it was essential to teach consumers, as they will learn to judge and avoid stepping into the trap of black-hearted sellers when they understand how to distinguish the difference between real fake. As MarkMonitor (2016) mentioned, clients can be an essential ally to minimize sales of counterfeit products with all associated costs. Respondent 5 also agreed that it was highly effective as the company can use the power of customers to find out the traces of "black-hearted" sellers and target them. Similarly, Respondent 8 emphasised that if they are not taught to differentiate, the customers will have no way to be alert, and there will be more and more "black-hearted" sellers. With these words, customers will also be able to understand the seriousness of these things.

In the interview session, most respondents commented that they informed more people to know the latest information through their social media platforms after the company provided the notification about the "black-hearted" sellers. Only a few companies were noticed their agents without announcement on the official website unless the customers had asked about this situation. In addition, most of the respondents explained that they always encouraged their customers to buy from the authorised distributors. The companies also made it clear that our company will not be held responsible for any products purchased from third-party platforms. In other words, Respondent 3 and Respondent 11 admitted that their companies did not pay attention to delivering messages related to "black-hearted" sellers to their customers, so it will still be possible that the customers cheated by "black-hearted" sellers.

Respondent 14 also indicated that his company rarely explains to their customers about how to differentiate between genuine and fake products, as this was rarely a problem for his company in Malaysia. Furthermore, the organisationshould develop appropriate marketing strategies to communicate messages that focus on the superiority associated with an authentic product and alert consumers to the risks associated with "black-hearted" sellers (Berman, 2008; Herstein et al., 2015; Jan & Louise, 2019). Based on the affordable skincare products sector, Respondent 15 mentioned that her company usually taught their customers on how to identify genuine products in the customers' group privately not to alert the "black-hearted" sellers. As well, Respondent 17 also showed that he made short videos to teach his customers the way to differentiate between genuine and fake products so that the customers can understand clearly. Additionally, Respondent

19 affirmed that her company would provide training, campaign, and justify by world-class endorsers to let their customers know the benefits of buying the regular products. She considered that the media and education platforms could teach customers more to upgrade their consumption and understand more informed choices.

On the contrary, Respondent 14 considered it was difficult to tell the difference to the customers and convince customers not to buy a pirated version and spend hundreds of ringgit to support the genuine one. Justified by Respondent 10, she mentioned that the communication was limited, as there was no official statement from her company, probably her company wanting to keep a low profile. Thus, only people who have been her company's members or customers will be emailed the latest news, so it was difficult to communicate information about "black-hearted" sellers to more people. In addition, only a few respondents discovered that the marketing communication strategy was medium effective in stopping "black-hearted" sellers. Revealed by Respondent 2 and Respondent 4, they inferred that even the companies had noticed the customers about the information, but the customer will not necessarily listen. Respondent 17 also highlighted that the customers need to experience it before they worry about it. If looking at it like that alone, they would not pay much attention to it.

Table 2 - Summary table for strategies to stop these "black-hearted" sellers from conducting their business

Strategies	Main key point from respondents.
Quality Strategies	- Improved its quality to distance itself from counterfeit products [P, Respondent 14]. - Keep updating the quality of products will be difficult to replicate the latest technology consistently [P, Respondent 10; Respondent 14]. - Contained a raw material factory was also difficult for "black-hearted" sellers to get complete raw materials to imitate its products [P, Respondent 18]. - Provided service quality improved the confidence of the customers [P, Respondent 13]. - The "black-hearted" sellers did not invest in improving the quality of fake products to widen the quality gap between actual and counterfeit products [P, Respondent 2].
Adjusting Price Strategies	- The company was not at liberty to change its pricing but only to do promotions on specific holidays [P, Respondent 1; Respondent 13; Respondent 17]. - As the route of these products was premium skin care products, so the price is not lowered to compete with the "black-hearted" merchants [P, Respondent 12]. - The prices did not change depending on the market unless the price change started in the USA [P, Respondent 18; Respondent 19]. - The price standardization made it easier for the companies to identify the "black-hearted" sellers due to the lower market prices [P, Respondent 8]. - If the price is inflated, people who like the products will be worried that the price and quality are not comparable because the price is too high [P, Respondent 10].
Technology Strategies	- With overt technology, it was still possible for a counterfeit from the "black-hearted" sellers to look the same as the genuine products [P, Respondent 5; Respondent 19]. - Overt technology in the company's logo, which can also be used to identify the authenticity [P, Respondent 6; Respondent 12]. - With the package sealing tapes, which can prove that this product has not been used or opened by anyone [P, Respondent 13; Respondent 17]. - Barcode can use to verify that it was genuine [P, Respondent 15; Respondent 17]. - It can be used to track products and distinguish between genuine and fake products [P, Respondent 8; Respondent 12]. - The company can follow the barcode and find out which agent is selling illegally if an agent sells their products on Shopee, Lazada, or any other platforms [P, Respondent 3; Respondent 16]. - It allows the customer to verify and trace back to the origin [P, Respondent 14]. - Now the products can be traced back to the original manufacturer [P, Respondent 14]. - The company, which was relatively new in the online skin care market, so will not invest much in the technology to combat the "black-hearted" sellers [P, Respondent 4].

Enforcement Strategies	-	If company's policy were stricter, the sellers would not dare to risk becoming "black-hearted" sellers [P, Respondent 7].
	-	The online shops that operate on third-party platforms will be ordered to cease operations and claim compensation [P, Respondent 5].
	-	The official online sellers could not check them one by one on third party platforms and appeal to the company [P, Respondent 10].
	-	If the "black-hearted" company was financially strong, it was possible to win in court against the official company [P, Respondent 20].
	-	It was depended on whether they were suing the company or the agent [P, Respondent 14].
	-	If Malaysia is careful about the laws in this area, it may be better to crack down on the unscrupulous sellers [P, Respondent 18].
	-	The company, which was relatively new in the online skin care market, may not seen this kind of serious problem [P, Respondent 13].
	-	A "black-hearted" seller may refrain from counterfeiting the company's products because of the fine [P, Respondent 3; Respondent 4].
Supply Chain Structure	-	There were fewer middlemen, the lower the risk of leaking product information for people to imitate [P, Respondent 3; Respondent 8; Respondent 14].
	-	It could prevent third shifts or product overruns [P, Respondent 2; Respondent 12].
	-	It could trace back the seller who bought the company's products [P, Respondent 1].
	-	Shipping products by the company only made it difficult for reselling problems to occur [P, Respondent 3; Respondent 10; Respondent 13; Respondent 18].
	-	"Black-hearted" sellers could bring ready-made products to the OEM factory to imitate them [P, Respondent 5].
	-	Choosing to work with a reliable outsourcing company and working out a good contract is crucial [P, Respondent 15].
	-	The OEM factories were a threat to the current market [P, Respondent 16].
Marketing Communication Strategy	-	Taught in the customers' group privately, so not to alert the "black-hearted" sellers [P, Respondent 15].
	-	Explained with the short videos will make customers more understand the difference [P, Respondent 17].
	-	The media and education platforms could teach customers more to upgrade their consumption and understand more informed choices [P, Respondent 19].
	-	Without delivering latest messages to customers will still be possible that the customers cheated by "black-hearted" sellers [P, Respondent 3; Respondnet 11].
	-	The company can use the power of customers to find out the traces of "black-hearted" sellers and target them [P, Respondent 5].
	-	Conveying the news to more people who know about them, so the information could also reach all corners of the world P, Respondent 6].
	-	The communication was limited [P, Respondent 10].
	-	Even the companies had noticed the customers about the information, but the customer will not necessarily listen [P, Respondent 2; Respondent 4].

5. Conclusion

The study aimed to provide information and knowledge about the activities of "black-hearted" sellers that exist on the online platform and to suggest strategies to prevent these "black-hearted" sellers from doing business. The analysis revealed that the activities of the "black-hearted" sellers on the online trading platform include counterfeiting, parallel imports, misleading information, and reselling without authorization. The analysis shows that counterfeit products are usually associated with products of high brand value, as these products are very well known in the market. Apart from this, parallel imports can also be mutually beneficial, as the customer can spend less and the seller can earn more money. Furthermore, resale without authorization was not as severe as counterfeiting to the point of breaking the law. There was also not much opinion on the issue of identity theft, as most felt that it would never happen to them and that even if it did, it would not have much impact on them. In addition, the second research objective was achieved, as the strategies to stop these "black-hearted" sellers from doing business are a quality strategy, a price adjustment strategy, a technology strategy, an enforcement strategy, a supply chain structure, and a marketing communication strategy. The analysis

showed that companies cannot simply lower the quality and market prices of products, as this is related to brand image. In addition, technology strategies have been very effective in combating "black-hearted" sellers, but there are still some loopholes that companies need to work together to address.

This study is beneficial not only for the online skin care industry but for other industries in which consumers buy their products and services online. The findings could facilitate researchers and businesses in creating strategies that promote trustworthy trading platforms as well as protect intellectual property from infringement and theft. Besides, a new conceptual framework was also generated based on the findings of this survey, providing insight into how these issues can be tackled with greater precision.

Since this research was conducted from the perspective of the online seller, future work can examine the organisation's perspective in depth. In this way, we can determine whether these strategies to combat "black-hearted" sellers are effective in helping organisations address these issues. In addition, future researchers could explore more details to find out other activities that could influence the online skin care market and increase the precautionary awareness of the organisation, online sellers, and customers.

Author Contributions

Acknowledgement

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